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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, MAY 16, 2007

In Today's Papers

PM Erdogan on Turkish Developments, Iraq

All papers report that on Tuesday, Prime Minister Erdogan answered questions coming from international press members following his speech at the 2007 World Congress of the International Press Institute (IPI) in Istanbul. "I believe that under the scope of international diplomacy, French president-elect Nicholas Sarkozy's attitude against Turkey's EU membership is wrong. Sarkozy should overcome such prejudices," Erdogan emphasized. On a controversial Turkish military statement defending secularism released April 27, Erdogan stressed that the military in Turkey is a state institution, and that the Turkish General Staff (TGS) reports to the Prime Minister. Erdogan maintained his ruling AK Party does not want to manipulate religion for political goals, adding secularism, too, should not be exploited for political purposes. "We have to exert joint efforts to develop a culture of freedom and compromise that can end the confrontation among countries or nations," Erdogan said.

He also voiced opposition to the ten percent electoral threshold, adding, however, that it was "necessary for Turkey at this moment." Erdogan noted he believed a pullout of coalition forces according to a schedule would stop the civil strife in Iraq, underlining a sudden withdrawal "would be wrong." The PM also said Turkey has suggested to the coalition forces, particularly the US, that Kirkuk should belong to the people of Iraq under a special status, which should be guaranteed in the constitution.

Sezer Signals Veto of Constitutional Reforms

Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report President Sezer has until May 26 to sign or veto a constitutional reform package including the direct election of the president for a renewable five year term. Sezer reportedly said the election of a president through direct popular vote required "a comprehensive legal arrangement," adding such a system if enforced would create two sources of power in Turkish politics -- remarks interpreted by papers as an indication that the President will veto the bill.

State Department Deputy Spokesman Casey on Turkey
Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report the US State Department deputy Spokesman Tom Casey told a daily press briefing "the United States continues to strongly support Turkey's candidacy for membership in the EU." "That's certainly a position that we've conveyed to Chancellor Merkel. I'm sure it's a position that we will have the opportunity to convey to President-elect Sarkozy," Casey said in response to a question on a planned visit by the French President-elect. On another question regarding the Turkish presidential election process, Casey said the US supports Turkish democracy and has full confidence in the democratic institutions in Turkey, stressing, "We expect that the Turkish people through elections will be the ones to decide who runs that country."

Turkey-Greece Natural Gas Pipeline to Open
Mainstream Milliyet reports that on July 14 the Prime Ministers of Turkey and Greece will open a natural gas pipeline between Turkey and Greece, which will carry Caspian as well as Middle Eastern gas to Europe through the two countries. The pipeline covers a 300-km from Karacabey near Istanbul in Turkey to Gumulcine (Komotini) in Greece, with 17-km of it passing underneath the Marmara Sea. Turkish energy Minister Hilmi Guler said he has discussed with the US Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman the Nabucco pipeline project which is to carry Azerbaijani natural gas to Europe through Turkey.

Turkey to Host 'Energy Giants'
Mainstream Milliyet reports Istanbul will host the "Energy Regulators' Regional Association" (ERRA) on May 21-22 with the participation of USAID and energy market regulators from Russia, Ukraine, and Armenia as well as giant energy companies Germany's RWE and Italy's ENEL and AES.

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Editorial Commentary: Secretary Rice in Moscow; Conflict in Palestine
Erdal Safak writes in the mainstream daily Sabah: "With her current trip to Moscow, Secretary Rice is using up the last chance to save the 'near future' of the world. Even though she emphasized that the difficulty in Moscow-Washington relations does not indicate a new cold war, recent developments make it seem otherwise. There are serious policy differences between the US and Russia, from the missile shield systems in Europe to Kosovo's independence, to Russian energy policy. Foreign experts interpret the current situation as either the worst days since the cold war or as a situation that could easily get out of control. It looks like freezing winds between the US and Russia are about blow from the Urals, through Europe and across the Atlantic."

Mete Cubukcu writes in the leftist daily Birgun: "The Palestinian people used their democratic right and voted for Hamas. The Palestinians are being punished for that choice with an embargo. Due to the US and Israel's insistence on a policy of punishment, Palestine was pushed into closing itself up, which eventually brought out the radical Islamic tendencies. Gaza is now a place of kidnapping and hostility toward foreigners just like Afghanistan and Iraq. Al-Qaeda used the chaotic situation in Palestine very much to its benefit and managed to infiltrate Palestinian groups effectively. Currently there are significant defenders of al-Qaeda's backward ideology in Palestine. All of this gives Israel the chance to use the situation like a trump card against Palestine. Israel has been using radical Islamic infiltration as a pretext for its aggression. This is a very critical time especially for the people of Palestine. There is no way to get rid of radicalism as long as isolation, outside pressure and occupation continue."

TV Highlights
NTV (6 A.M.)

Domestic News

- Turkish search teams have found the bodies of a Briton and a Pakistani in the wreckage of a missing Iran-bound private plane which crashed in the mountainous region of the Trabzon province in northeast Turkey.

- Two Turkish soldiers have been killed by landmines believed to have been planted by the PKK in Dicle in Diyarbakir province.
- Kurdish activist Leyla Zana was interrogated by the prosecutor in Diyarbakir for calling Talabani, Barzani and the PKK's imprisoned leader Ocalan the "three leaders of the Kurdish people" in a speech she delivered during Nevruz celebrations.
- CHP leader Deniz Baykal is to meet Wednesday DSP leader Zeki Sezer to discuss unification before July 22 elections.

International News

- In a meeting with the representatives of three religions in Brussels, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said destruction of Christian sites in Turkish Cyprus won't be tolerated.
- Turkish Cypriots staged protests in Brussels calling for lifting the isolation of Turkish Cyprus.
- Iraq's President Talabani told The Daily Telegraph British military officers have held secret talks with the leaders of the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.
- The Turkish General Staff reported in its website that despite positive developments in Turkish-Greek relations, interceptions of Turkish jets by Greek aircrafts in the Aegean and Mediterranean continue.

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